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ABSTRACT

This study determines those specific social studies skills that high school social studies teachers believe students should have developed as a result of their instruction in a high school social studies program, and differences in the importance attached to specific skills between high school social studies teachers classified as having a "high orientation" and those having a "low orientation" to skills. A random sample of one hundred and fifty Kansas high school social studies teachers were mailed a two part questionnaire to measure the skills orientation and ranking of skills. Findings indicate that the most important social studies skills, according to the participating teachers, were the ability of the high school student to distinguish between fact and opinion, to discriminantly read rewspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, and to apply problem/solving and critical thinking skills. Although the skills orientation of the two groups differed significantly the degree of impcrtance attached to each specific skill by the "high skills" and "low skills" did not differ significantly. (SJM)

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The Importance of Specific Skills to High School Social Studies Teachers

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SPECIFIC SKILLS TO HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

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The objectives or goals of social studies education have been traditionally categorized into the cognitive, affective, or skill domains. Objectives in each category should contribute to the overall objective of social studies education; namely, the development of effective citizens, or more explicitly the development of the ability of each citizen to engage in a critical analysis of public issues. It is the professional responsibility of the social studies teacher to select the content, values, and skills necessary for the attainment of this objective. Not to use all domains to their maximum in attaining the overall objective of social studies education is an abnegation of responsibility on the part of the teacher.

Of all of the domains it would appear that skills have received the least attention from social studies teachers. This presents a strange paradox for as Jarolimek (3) states "perhaps much of what the pupil learns in the social studies will wear thin or become obsolete. But skills learned in school continue to be functional indefinitely, or for as long as they are used." Indeed, "helping young people develop and use skills effectively is one of the central purposes of social studies education." (2) In an ever-changing world the value of skills instruction becomes increasingly important. At a time of increased desirability there appears,

ironically enough, to be a decreased emphasis placed by teachers on social studies skills. Morse (4) indicated that almost all writers who have given attention to the problem of social studies skills have championed their inclusion into the school program, and have deplored the obvious neglect of the matter on the part of most teachers.

The failure of teachers to include skills in their social studies program may be due to the fact that they are not certain which skills are the major or shared responsibility of their subject area. In 1971 Orlandi (5) indicated that there is substantial agreement among social studies educators that many skills ought to be developed but there are at the same time strong differences of opinion about which skills deserve the most emphasis in the social studies. Preliminary to the improvement of skills instruction in the social studies is the need to determine teacher perceptions of the importance of specific skills for their high school students.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine those social studies skills considered to be most important to high school social studies teachers. To fulfill this purpose answers were sought to the following two questions:

1. What are the most specific skills that high school social studies teachers believe students should have developed as a result of their instruction in a high school social studies program?
2. Are there differnces in the importance attached to

specific skills between high school social studies teachers classified as having a "high orientation to skills" and those teachers having a "low orientation to skills"?

Data Gathering Devices and Procedures

Subjects

A random sample of one hundred-fifty Kansas high school social studies teachers were selected to participate in the study. An initial mail-out and two subsequent follow-ups secured questionnaire returns from one hundred-thirty teachers (87%). A total of one hundred-twenty questionnaires (80%) were completed correctly; hence, data from these questionnaires were utilized in answering the questions listed in the Statement of the Problem.

Instrument

A two-part questionnaire was developed to gather the data necessary for the study. Part I of the questionnaire purported to determine the skills orientation of the participating teachers. Fifteen statements related to the teaching of social studies skills were gleaned from recent literature in social studies education. The statements were randomly written with either a positive or negative orientation toward the teaching of skills, and placed on a Likert Scale. A teacher's score on the fifteen items (range 75-15) was used as an indication of his/her orientation toward the importance of teaching social studies skills at the high school level. All teachers (60) with scores above the median for the total group were classified as having a "high skills orientation". Conversely, those teachers with scores below the median were believed

to have a "low skills orientation".

Two sample questionnaire items are as follows:

1. The teaching of social studies skills may be the most important contribution that a high school social studies teacher can make to his/her students.
2. Because of the "knowledge explosion" and the rapidly changing nature of American society social studies skills are more important than ever for high school students.

All items were so worded that a high degree of content validity was maintained.

A method of item analysis discussed by Edwards (1) was utilized to determine the extent to which each of the fifteen statements differentiated between the "high skills" and "low skills" groups. With this technique t-tests are used to evaluate the differences in the mean responses to each attitude statement by the two groups. There were significant differences (.05 or greater) in the responses of the "high skills" and "low skills" to each item on the questionnaire. The estimated reliability of Part I of the questionnaire was .83 as indicated by Kuder-Richardson Formula 20. The ability of Part I to differentiate "high skills" and "low skills groups was substantiated.

Part II of the questionnaire consisted of thirty specific social studies skills written in the form of statements, and randomly placed on a Likert Scale. The skills were selected for inclusion in the study because of their frequency of mention in related social studies literature. Each participating teacher could indicate the degree to which they felt each individual skill was important to their students.

Results

Table 1 discloses the mean ranking of the importance attached to each social studies skill. Rankings of the total sample as well as the "high skills" and "low skills" groups are identified. The ranking of skills by the total sample identified those skills believed by high school social studies teachers to be most important for their students.

According to the participating teachers the most important social studies skill relates to the ability of the high school student to distinguish between fact and opinion. Of near equal importance to the teachers were developing the students ability to read discriminately newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, and to apply problem-solving and critical thinking skills. It should be obvious that several of the skills listed in Table 1 could actually be identified as critical thinking skills.

Least attention in a high school social studies program would be given by teachers to developing student skills necessary to write essays, research papers, and term papers, speak with accuracy and poise, and utilize parliamentary procedures.

A further perusal of Table 1 indicates the perceptions of teachers regarding the importance of all thirty skills. It should be noted that all of the skills have been identified as being either the major or shared responsibility of the social studies teacher.

The "high skills" and "low skills" groups did not differ significantly in their rankings of the total list of skills. A Spearman rank order correlation coefficient of .825 was obtained between the skill rankings of the two groups. Although the skills

Table 1. - Mean Rankings of Social Studies Skills by Participating Teachers

As a result of their instruction in high school social studies, students should develop the skills necessary:	Total Sample*		High Skills Group		Low Skills Group	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
To distinguish fact and opinion	4.38	1.0	4.52	1.0	4.23	1.0
Apply problem-solving and critical thinking skills.	4.34	2.5	4.50	2.0	4.17	5.5
To read with discrimination newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, etc.	4.34	2.5	4.47	3.5	4.21	2.0
To relate, compare, and evaluate information gained through listening and observing.	4.33	4.0	4.47	3.5	4.18	4.0
To examine material for contradictions consistency, reasonableness, and freedom from bias.	4.28	5.0	4.40	5.0	4.16	7.0
To learn independently.	4.24	6.0	4.27	11.0	4.20	3.0
To locate specific information or materials.	4.22	7.5	4.31	8.0	4.17	5.5
To select main ideas and supporting facts.	4.22	7.5	4.33	7.0	4.11	9.5
To summarize material.	4.21	9.0	4.28	9.5	4.15	8.0
To listen and observe with a definite purpose.	4.18	10.0	4.28	9.5	4.08	11.0
To draw inferences and make generalizations from data.	4.16	11.0	4.22	12.0	4.11	9.5
To recognize and analyze propaganda	4.12	12.0	4.38	6.0	3.86	19.0
To work with others on committees, small groups, etc.	4.11	13.0	4.21	13.0	4.00	12.0
To hypothesize solutions to problems.	4.03	14.0	4.08	17.5	3.95	17.0
To gather facts from field trips and interviews.	4.02	15.5	4.11	16.0	3.98	13.5
To collect, evaluate and organize information around a clearly defined topic.	4.02	15.5	4.07	19.0	3.97	15.0
To make oral and/or written reports.	3.99	17.0	4.15	15.0	3.83	20.0
To select answers to questions from materials heard, viewed, or read.	3.97	18.5	3.97	23.0	3.98	13.5
To work with social studies books, e.g., use table of contents, indexes, headings.	3.97	18.5	3.98	22.0	3.96	16.0
To take notes.	3.96	20.0	4.08	17.5	3.90	18.0
To arrange facts, events, and ideas in sequence.	3.91	21.0	4.01	20.5	3.80	21.5
To outline specific topics to be investigated.	3.88	22.0	4.01	20.5	3.75	25.0
To understand time and chronology.	3.84	23.0	3.87	25.0	3.80	21.5
To interpret or construct charts, tables, graphs.	3.83	24.5	3.88	24.0	3.77	24.0
To interpret pictorial materials and maps.	3.83	24.5	4.17	14.0	3.48	29.0
To interpret cartoons.	3.82	26.0	3.85	26.0	3.78	23.0
To develop a sensitivity to language.	3.70	27.0	3.72	27.5	3.67	26.5
To understand parliamentary procedure.	3.65	28.0	3.72	27.5	3.58	28.0
To speak with accuracy and poise.	3.63	29.0	3.58	29.0	3.67	26.5
Write essays, research papers, term papers.	3.40	30.0	3.37	30.0	3.42	30.0

*Rankings based upon a five point (5-1) scale.

orientation of the two groups differed significantly the degree of importance attached to each specific skill by the two groups did not. It is interesting to note, however, those instances in which the rankings differed markedly. For example, the ability to analyze propaganda was ranked sixth in importance to the teachers in the "high skills" group, while it was only nineteenth in importance to the "low skills" teachers.

Discussion

It is hoped that schools interested in developing comprehensive social studies skills programs would benefit from this study. A rank-order listing of those skills deemed most important to social studies teachers should prove useful. Teacher agreement on the importance of specific skills is a necessary first step in the development of a skills program. Skills will be relegated to a position of secondary importance unless some attempt is made to determine which skills are the responsibility of the high school teacher. The need for more attention to skills instruction should be obvious. If the skills identified in this study are important to teachers then they surely must be included in an integral part of any social studies program.

It should be emphasized that any list of skills remains useless until translated into specifics that can be accepted by teachers. This study has identified those skills deemed most important to high school social studies teachers.

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